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PREL, SNAR, SU, XK, XL

SUBJECT: BELGIAN COUNCIL OF MINISTERS FUND SEVERAL POSITIVE
EFFORTS

¶1. (U) Summary. The Belgian Council of Ministers meeting held July 20 approved and provided budgetary allowances for several economic, political and military initiatives. Of particular interest were a C-130 for Afghanistan, a NATO mine clearing operation in the Baltics, and continued participation in the fight against drugs in the Caribbean.
End Summary.

MILITARY DETACHMENTS

¶2. (U) The Belgian Minister for Defense, Andre Flahaut, made several suggestions at the July 20 Council of Ministers. At his request, many key initiatives were given budgetary authorization:

Afghanistan: a C-130 detachment comprised of one C-130 and 17 soldiers will be stationed at Kabul International Airport (KAIA) and placed under the operational control of ISAF commander (COMISAF). The detachment will be engaged for a four-month period, beginning September 15. Its missions will consist of support flights for transporting material and personnel, and medical evacuations.

Baltic Sea: Contributing the Belgian NS Narcis and 46 soldiers, the Belgian Royal Navy will participate in the search and destruction of marine mines and explosive devices in the territorial waters of Estonia and its exclusive economic zone (ZEE). Entitled Open Spirit 2006, this operation will be under the control of the Estonian Navy.

Caribbean Sea: The Belgian frigate Westdiep and 159 soldiers will participate in an operation monitoring sea traffic attempting to identify ships transporting illegal substances. The frigate will provide administrative, logistic and operational support for a legal detachment of the U.S. Coast Guard charged with boarding suspect vessels.

DR Congo: Forty-one soldiers will remain in Kalemie, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DROC) to ensure the smooth transition between training underway for Congolese integrated brigades to technical training planned for general-purpose engineers. The detachment force will increase to 67 soldiers beginning August 22.

NEW NATO HQ

¶4. (U) The Council agreed to undertake a feasibility study pertaining to the construction of the new permanent head office of NATO in Brussels. As agreed in the December 8, 2004 Memorandum of Agreement signed between Belgium and NATO, Belgium will assume management of the project. The Council

selected the PM, FM, and MoD as signatories to the Memorandum of Agreement with the Secretary-General of NATO.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

¶5. (U) The Minister of Development Cooperation, Armand De Decker, won approval from the Council of Ministers for the third management contract between the Belgian State and Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC). BTC is a public law company that has the exclusive authority to formulate and implement Belgian direct bilateral cooperation as a public service task. This contract is aimed at the optimal harmonization of international assistance. This would require a higher degree of ownership on the part of the country partner receiving assistance, in the hopes of eliminating redundancies and other inefficiencies during all stages of the development process.

PREVENTATIVE DIPLOMACY

¶6. (U) FM De Gucht suggested financing several preventative diplomacy efforts. The Council approved initiatives in Sudan, Kazakhstan, and several Central American states. Through the NGO "Close the Gap", 300 computers will be delivered to the Sudanese Parliament and ministries in the south of the country. Special NATO funds will be allocated for the destruction of a stock of 27,000 light and small gauge weapons (ALPC), and portable air-defense systems (MANPAD) in Kazakhstan. A public awareness campaign developed by the Oscar Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Development will educate Central American teenagers on the impacts of weapons on their lives. All of these projects were approved for funding.

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